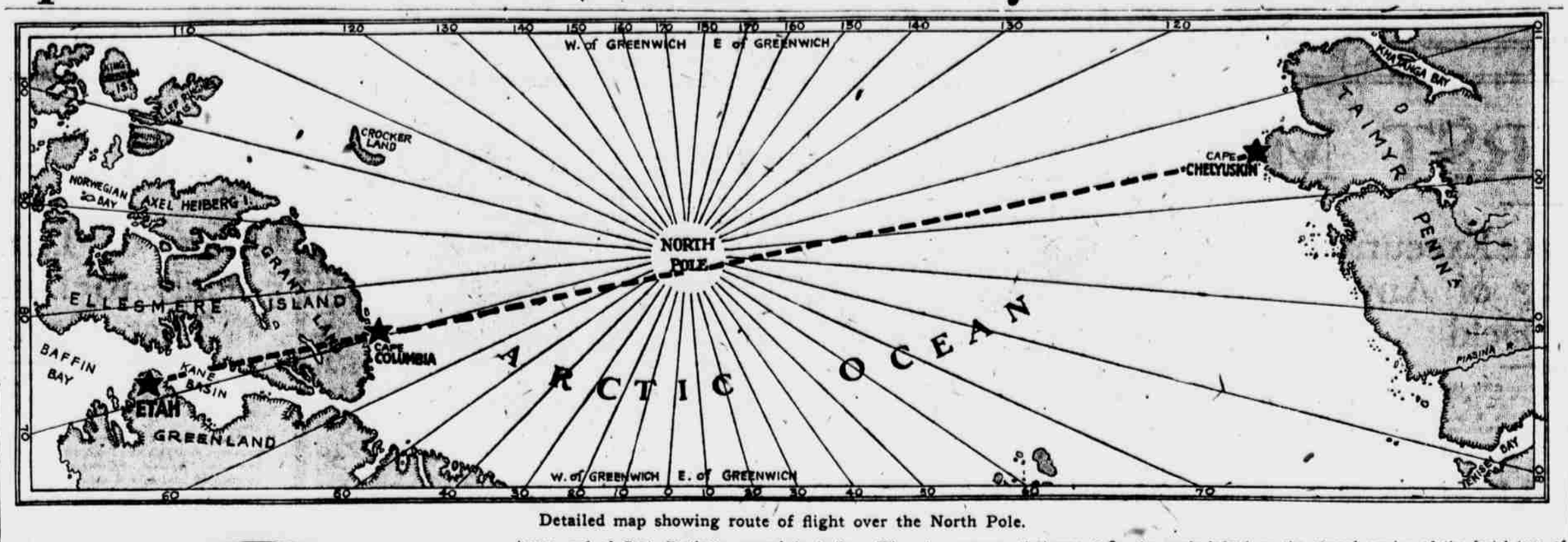
How Capt. Bob Bartlett Means to Fly Across the North Pole

Will Use Airplanes to Establish Base on Cape Columbia, and Thence Start for Chelyuskin, Siberia, via Earth's Axis, All in Six Polar Summer Weeks

Million Miles of Unexplored Region Lie in Triangles His Airmen Are to Cover—Sketch of Most Famous of Circumpolar Shipmasters, Now to Lead Expedition



Detailed map showing route of flight over the North Pole.

Photos by a SUN staff photographer.

Capt. Robert A. Bartlett.

By HARRY ESTY DOUNCE.

CAPT. BOB BARTLETT is going to fly to the pole. Don't smile at the positive statement. It is his own. When Capt. Bartlett announces that he's going to do anything you will, if you know him, put your money on that thing being done.

The late Elbert Hubbard wrote a sermon entitled "A Message to Garcia." Its text was the famous exploit of A. S. Rowan in Cuba, and its precept, deliver the goods. That Rowan had done. He was held up to youth as a model. But in Newfoundland, where Capt. Bartlett comes from, the physical delivery of the goods, across whatever obstacle, is the rule. They do not celebrate one of them who does it. They wouldn't know what to make of one who failed.

The captain himself unaffectedly—constitutionally—shrinks from praise as the devil from holy water. If you want to make him uncomfortable and silent when you meet him, admire him aloud; tell him how good he is.

This, then, is not praise. It is cold, Arctic fact, on his record (which will be outlined in a minute) that he in his forty odd years has overcome more daunting obstacles to deliver more significant goods than any other circumpolar seaman. In short, when the captain says he is going to fly across the pole, he is; short of some mischance now unforeseen and inconceivable. Should it happen to be trouble with his airplanes his own resolution will mean even more than his mechanician's skill in the effort to right the trouble and go on.

Start From Cape Columbia.

He means to take off next June from Cape Columbia, Peary's last land base, norther than northernmost Greenland. He will fly to the pole, gather data there and fly on, nearly straight across to Cape Cheiyuskin on the Siberian shore. He was ready to do it two years ago, but then the requisite "sinews" weren't forthcoming. Now to all appearances they are.

But the pole flight, the most spectacular feature of the captain's plans, is really no more than an incident of the project before his purposed expedition. What interests him, and with him the scientists and engineers and the public spirited laymen who know and back him, is the exploration of a million uncharted square miles of the earth's surface. Did you realize that only one-seventh of it is accurately mapped, and that another seventh, including this million square miles of the Arctic, isn't mapped at all?

Capt. Bartlett will use an improved wooden drift ship of the type of Nansen's Fram and Peary's Roosevelt (the Karluk was of a different model, vulnerable to ice), as the mother ship of his airplanes and balloons. He will have six weeks of the mild polar summer for his preliminary work, including the cross pole flight. The unknown Arctic's boundaries roughly form a stupendous triangle. Its angles are Capes Columbia and Chelyuskin and Wrangel Islands northeast of the Bering tip of Asia. Only Peary, dashing to the pole and back, has penetrated this triangle to speak of, and the pole and Peary's route are both in its Columbia-Chelyuskin side. Stefansson's party with the ill fated Karluk nibbled just inside the Columbia-Wrangel line. The rest is virgin.

Makes His Bow at Etah.

Bartlett will set to work from Etah, Greenland. Instead of waiting for the summer to open a passage for his ship to Cape Columbia he proposes to get there pronto with his secondary airplanes, which are to carry the material for his airplane base on the cape. He will then be ready to start with his big plane for the pole and beyond, and he means to have a second base at Chelyuskin—its establishment being the solid reason for the cross polar flight, and meanwhile to have a third established on Wrangel.

From these three this own party and the auxiliaries will command the unknown triangle. They intend to put in a solid year of exploratory work at least.

It was the unknown triangle on which Stefansson, with Bartlett for captain of his Karluk, had designs. He rather expected to find a new Arctic continent, something in the nature of another and remoter Greenland. Capt. Bob is without such expectation. Islands, he says, are the largest new landfalls he figures on. He hopes to map them, but especially to get the ocean bottom sounded and mapped, and, above all, sampled with dredges. It holds riches of flora and fauna for the biologists, he says. His parties will gather specimens.

Of the details of his equipment he is telling very little just now for general publication. For instance, he does not care to say what make of planes he will use, or what type, dimensions, speed and freight lift his principal one is to be and have. This is because his project is internationally known and rival explorers and airmen and aviation societies plan to try to beat him and America to it. Let them, he says, and good luck to them, and may the best expedition win. But he means to win himself!

"I've noticed in my experience that the fellow who wrote those lines about the owl had it right. You know—

"'A wise old owl sat on a tree,
The less he said the more he saw,
The more he saw the more he knew.'

"I'm taking a leaf from the owl's book at present."

Some time ago he stated that if he could get a plane of sufficient spread of surface for the thin circumpolar air and ... a series of engines of sufficient ... the flight to the pole would ... ble at once. What he has suc... n getting now the owl saith, n ... orters. But Capt. Bob says t' ... are perfected and all the de ... orked out. The writer doubt ... to save his life this man could ... ge or embellish the plain truth ... ch questionable gifts are not in h...

His expedition will be called the Roosevelt Memorial Expedition. His ship, built to his order, will be the Roosevelt II. The captain knew the Colonel well, used to visit him at Oyster Bay. They were bound to know each other, being contemporaries. The captain was the Colonel's kind of a man, and the Colonel the captain's.

"Wouldn't he want to go along, though," said the writer, "if he were alive!"

"I don't know," said Capt. Bob. "I don't much think so. He'd have been interested as anything—in fact, he was; Admiral Peary and I have been talking polar airplane work for a good while, you know. But the Colonel's personal outdoor inclinations ran more to the tropics, I think. Shooting big game in the jungles, and all that."

It was President Roosevelt who let Peary off on leave in the namesake ship to find the pole. He did this twice, and the second time Peary won. Capt. Bartlett, as every one knows, commanded the Roosevelt, and on the last and triumphant dash had charge of the supporting parties, and personally went as far as latitude 88 N. He is thus the white man who has been nearest the pole, the Admiral being the white man who has been there.

What Mr. Roosevelt Did.

Also, it was Assistant Secretary of the Navy Theodore Roosevelt who in 1897 wrestled out of Congress what money was given to Langley to experiment. Langley needed more and died of a broken heart for lack of it, but that was not Roosevelt's fault. Further, it was President Roosevelt who approved the ordering for the army of the first airplane, a Wright, that any army had. And finally, Lieut. Quentin Roosevelt—but here a decent reverence stops us short, even if there were anything more than the name itself to be said.

Associated with Capt. Bartlett are Admiral Peary, Henry A. Wise Wood, Henry Woodhouse, Admiral Fiske, John Hays Hammond, Jr., Rear Admiral William N. Little, Prof. Charles L. Poor, Col. E. Lester Jones, Charles Jerome Edwards, Major Cushman A. Rice, Major J. C. McCoy and the others of the executive committee of the Aero Club of America. In fact, Peary means to go along, part of the way at least, and to make his headquarters at Etah.

During six weeks or more of July and August the temperature in the polar regions is seldom below 60 on the comfortable side of zero. Where land is uncovered—and a great deal more is uncovered than people suppose, who conceive of the Arctic as one vast, unbroken white desert—birds sing and flowers bloom and game is to be had for the shooting. In view of all this, and of the knowledge that has gone into the Roosevelt Memorial expeditionary plans and preparations, men who understand these matters are saying unreservedly that at least the summer work, including the cross-pole flight, stands to be done successfully.

In view of his knowledge of nothing but Capt. Bartlett on short acquaintance, and of Capt. Bartlett's career from some ten years of reading about it, the writer is equally confident that the auxiliary scouting planes will rake the unknown area like gyrfalcons, that the balloons will go where they are wanted to sound and dredge and measure this and that for the meteorologists—meaning the weather men—and that the saucer bottomed drift ship will do her part and return, when her master is ready, under her own steam; though as Stefansson in an unconsciously prophetic moment said when engaging Bartlett:

"He is a man who is not afraid of hurting his ship and not eager to save it at the expense of the expedition. He goes cheerfully into such a hazard, risking the crushing of his stout vessel in the tightening grasp of the ice."

The Captain himself is not an aviator. On the face of his statements he has no great understanding of aviation mechanics. However, he has been flying, and it is a safe conjecture that he has the understanding all the same. His favorite diversion is reading. He reads everything, instinctively recognizing and preferring what is good. And when he has use for a piece of special knowledge in his work he studies and assimilates. More than that, he goes to headquarters and learns at first hand from the men who know. And his years of rough Arctic experience have made him a resourceful jack of most trades, as well as a master of explorer's ships.

No Worry About Accidents.

He was asked what would become of his big planes crew in case of hopeless trouble bringing them down half way from anywhere.

"Our ships and our planes and the bases will each have the best wireless equipment there is. We'll be always in touch with each other in that way. The planes will know where the ships are and vice versa. If any of us get in trouble we can find ourselves. Of course the big plane will carry petrol and a store of concentrated provisions. There can't be enough for an indefinite journey on foot, but you can live off the country—provided a man's not too squeamish about his food."

Speak to him of danger and you instantly get a high rise. Scurvy, for example, he has never even seen, though he knows how to treat it.

"When they talk of the hazards and hardships, I have to laugh. It's no more dangerous knocking around the Arctic than it is around New York. It used to be, but experience and modern equipment have made it a thing of the past. The lowest temperature I ever ran into? Sixty-eight below. But when you get figures like that you can't, in the nature of things, have storms, and in the dry, still air the discomfort amounts to a very small fraction of what people think.

"The men who explore the tropics have it worse a thousand times. When they come out they're wrecks. When we come out we're in ideal condition. Up there outdoors and at work I feel as if I could jump over a house. Here in New York I feel like a different man, and a blamed sight poorer one physically. Why, in summer the weather in 80 degrees north latitude is like the finest Indian summer down here you ever knew."

He has indeed been doing a lot of flying, as a passenger and observer, the last few months. He likes it fine, and can't wait to get at it up there with his cartographers and camera men along.

But about this danger business——

Not meaning to dispute him, suppose we read of the sinking of the Karluk, in Capt. Bartlett's own book on her last voyage:

Stayed After All Had Gone.

"After every one else had left the ship I remained on board to await the end. For a time the chief engineer and Hadley stayed with me. There was a big fire in the galley, and we moved the Victrola in there to while away the time. After the first sharp crash and the closing in of the ice the pressure was not heavy, and all through the morning of the 11th and well into the afternoon the ship remained in about the same position as when she was first struck.

"No more water was coming in; the ice was holding her up. I would play a few records—we had 150 or so altogether—and then I would go outside and walk around the deck, watching for any change in the ship's position. It cleared off toward noon and there was a little twilight, but the snow was still blowing. As I played the records I threw them into the stove. At last I found Chopin's 'Funeral March,' played it over and laid it aside.

"I ate when I was hungry and had plenty of coffee and tea. My companions had gone over to the floe and turned in early in the morning. It was quite comfortable in the galley, for I could keep the fire going with coal from the galley locker. At times I would take a look into the engine room, being careful not to get too far from an exit; the water was nearly up to the deck.

"At 3:15 P. M. the ice opened and the ship began to get lower in the water. Then the ice closed again for a while and supported her by the bowsprit and both quarters. About 3:30 she began to settle in earnest, and as the minutes went by the decks were nearly awash. Putting Chopin's 'Funeral March' on the Victrola I started the machine, and when the water came running along the deck and poured down the hatches I stood up on the rail, and as she took a header, with the rail level with the ice, I stepped off.

Start of a Famous Trip.

"It was at 4 P. M. on January 11, 1914, with the blue Canadian Government ensign at her maintopmast head, blowing out straight and cutting the water as it disappeared, and the Victrola in the galley sending out the strains of Chopin's 'Funeral March,' that the Karluk sank, going down by the head in thirty-eight fathoms of water. As she took the final plunge I bared my head and said, 'Adios, Karluk!' It was light enough to see and the rest of the party came out of the camp to watch the end. As she went down the yards lodged on the ice and broke off, in such a narrow lane of water did she disappear."

But there's no danger. The Karluk went down in the frozen sea northeast of Wrangell and due north of Herald Island. Her complement of humans, left on the ice, made what they called shipwreck camp. A party of four, headed by Dr. A. Forbes Mackay, decided to try for land before the captain thought the conditions favorable. He advised against it, but gave them the supplies the venture required and they left camp and went to disaster. With Bartlett they left a statement clearing him of responsibility.

He now (always, remember, there's no danger) led the others to Wrangell Island with the stores. He put a man in charge of their camp and himself, with one Eskimo youth named Katakovick and one sledge with seven dogs, struck off across the ice for the Siberian coast to get the news of the disaster to Ottawa as speedily as might be and send back help.

He started March 18, 1914, and he delivered his message to Garcia, arriving, after crossing the moving ice and trudging down the shore thinly sprinkled with Siberian Eskimos, at East Cape, the tip of Asia that reaches out for the tip of America, on April 19, and going thence to Emma Harbor and Nome.

Cannot Summarize the Story.

The story of that trip of his cannot be worthily summarized. It needs to be read; and his book, which is excellent, seems far less generally known than the public deserves. Patiently, perseveringly, in the face of wicked weather, he found his way around the changing leads or ice field crevasses. One after another they opened, gulping for him, forcing him to zigzag. His Eskimo, though good stuff, lost heart, especially when Siberia was in sight, having once heard that Siberian Eskimos kill their American relatives who fall into their hands. Altogether the captain on foot—losing dog after dog, buying substitutes as he could with pieces of his equipment, crossing the treacherous young ice with poles and yanking his sledge and his companion after him—trekked it 500 miles.

It was touch and go with them night and day. He admits it—reluctantly. But he makes nothing of it in his book, and now he calls it part of the day's work.

Meanwhile down here in hazardous big cities we were reading of Capt Bob A. Bartlett lost in Arctic waste. Admiral Peary spoke up. It was believed that the Karluk was lost, but the Admiral said roundly that Bartlett was equal to any emergency and would be heard from yet. And so he was; half snowblind, with sick, aching arms and his legs swollen their entire length as if with a general case of "mal de racquette," he mushed into the outposts of civilization and told his story to the eager cables.

His book is dedicated simply "To Mrs. William Bartlett." She, one gathers, is the captain's mother, by whom he sets illimitable store. He is not married. "I've been up against it more than once," he says, with his fleeting blink of a bashful smile. "I nearly got up to the scratch three times. But I slacked out of it, and I shouldn't wonder!"

He was not keen on being photographed for this article; his face, he said, looked too much like a prizefighter's mug. It looks like nothing of the kind. It suggests a Rodin's rugged version of the facial type of William Hart, the cowboy movie hero. Which taken all together is complimentary. He has clear dark blue eyes, the lower lids of which have acquired from months and years of low, low temperatures, a habit of holding up firm to shield the eyeballs. Peary's and Amundsen's have done the same. In spite of all his skin must have gone through in Arctic storms, it retains a coloring and clarity that an English beauty would envy.

As to physique, that he is uncommonly powerful is plain at a glance. His shoulders are not wide and are not classically square. They are big and knit solidly into his frame—and it is a curious fact, but this formation, not the gymnasium director's and the Athenian sculptor's ideal, is the one you find among woodsmen who are famed for endurance and strength. At hauling and heaving and carrying weights such men can wear out the human statue in nineteen of twenty cases.

The Captain's stature is good average. His eye, however, seems uncommonly tall. Size him up, and you would probably think it over through the whole of an Arctic night before you started a mutiny in a crew of his.

He was born at Bragus, Newfoundland, August 15, 1875. He was oldest of thirteen children, and it has been said that his mother wanted to have a minister made of him. At 17, having done a lot of small boat work and seal hunting through his boyhood, he ran away to sea. His start in distinctively Arctic navigation was made under the wing of an uncle, the same who had commanded the rescue ship that brought the Tyson party back from the polar ice in 1872. Bob Bartlett, growing up, continued this navigation specialty. He first went out with Peary in 1897-1898. A better campmate than the Admiral he says no man could ask.

Having been Peary's ship captain on two expeditions, by 1910 he found himself in casual work and command of a ship of his own, the Newfoundland steam sealer Boethic. He took up the Rainey-Whitney polar hunting expedition.

In April, 1911, he completed his naturalization as a United States citizen. At the time he was living in Eleventh street, Brooklyn, and hoping to use Peary's methods in a South Polar dash of his own. But Amundsen and poor Scott attained the pole, and in May, 1913, Capt. Bob signed up with Stefansson.

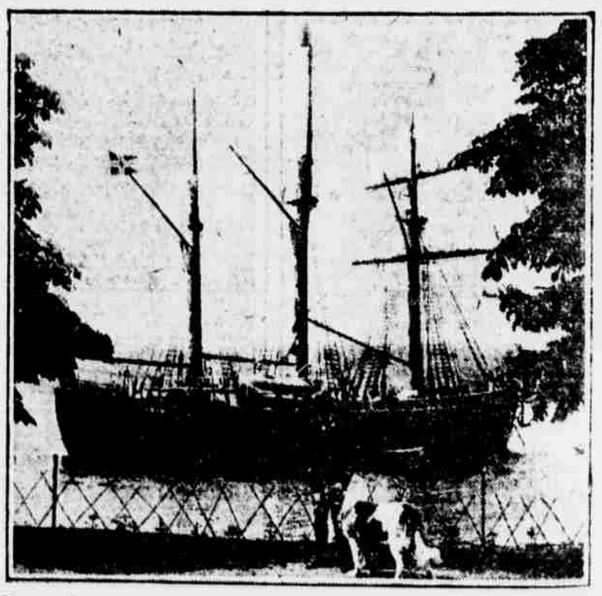
His story of disaster and escape and rescue came back from St. Michael Island, Alaska, June 1, 1914. A year and a half later some one discovered him working on the North River piers as a foreman of stevedores. He was far from being financially reduced to it, but explained that he wanted to get back in touch with other men's world for a while, and that except forcing a vessel through the ice floes, eating raw seal meat and driving dogs, stevedoring was the only thing that he knew how to do. And the silent foreman from the silences could juggle a barrel of sugar in a way to make the huskiest waterfront navvy stand agape. He put in his evening reading such books as his favorite Rubaiyat and—what do you think, in a case of so confirmed a seafaring bachelor?—and Keats!

Three years ago he hoped to get away to explore the unknown triangle, taking airplanes along and making four or five years of it. But presently, owing to the war, he had to give up hope of getting away that summer. By December he announced that he himself would captain a party to "clear up the unfinished business of the Arctic," as soon as he should have $50,000 guaranteed, and that he already knew where to find more than half.

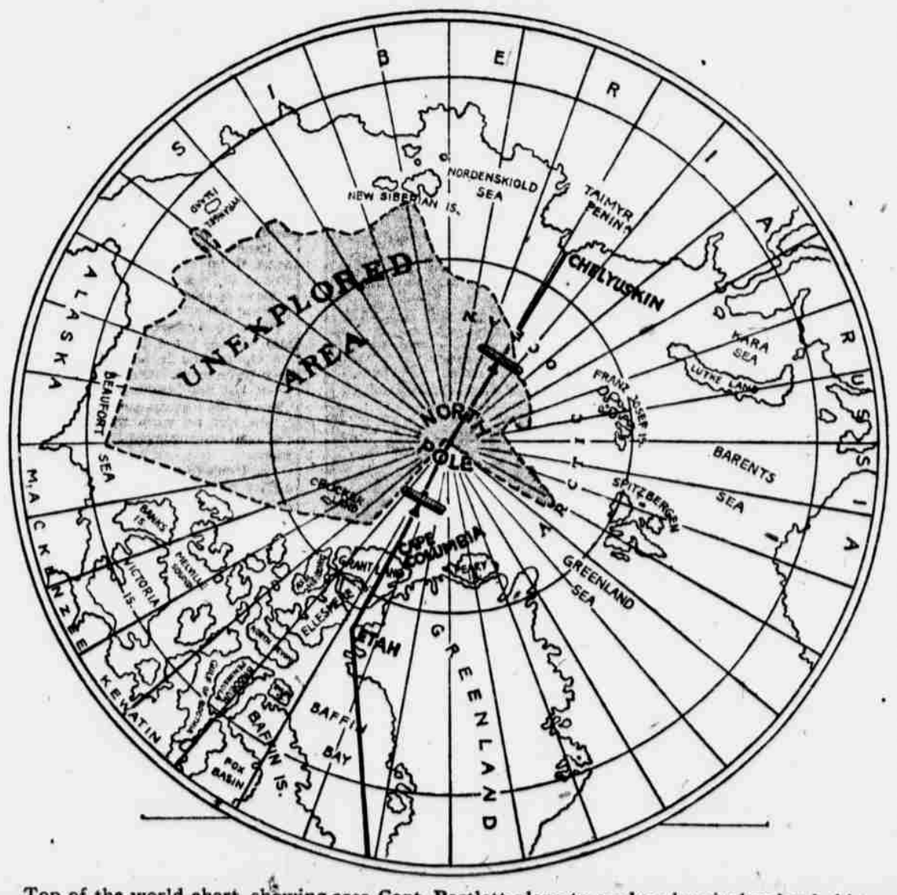
In June, 1917, the American Museum of Natural History started him off with a Garcia message, this time to rescue the Donald MacMillan party of explorers. One ship, the Denmark, had failed to bring them back the summer before. Bartlett said he was going to get them, and he did.

Last November he thought his big plane for next summer should carry more than two tons, including a sledge and ten dogs and a month's provisions. He expected to fly at an average height of 500 feet on the cross polar trip.

From Etah to the pole is about 600 miles; from Cape Columbia, less than two-thirds of that. On to Cape Chelyuskin means a broken flight of 1,100. As aforesaid, you can bet on Capt. Bob.



Nansen's vessel, the Fram, built especially to avoid crushing by ice.



Top of the world chart, showing area Capt. Bartlett plans to explore by airplane and ship.

Rumania in Money Plight

"RUMANIA is looking to the Allies for the return to Bucharest of the Rumanian National Treasury, now in the hands of Trotzky and Lenine," declared Major Radu Irimescu of the Rumanian army, who has arrived here on a mission for his Government. Major Irimescu also acted as courier for Mr. Vopicka, the American Minister in Bucharest, and brought documents to the State Department.

Rumania, said Major Irimescu, is doing the best she can to reestablish her national monetary system in the absence of the National Treasury and the gold that was in it and on the basis of which the paper money was issued.

When Field Marshal von Mackensen approached Bucharest from the south and from the east in the fall of 1916 and Gen. von Falkenhayn was coming through the Predeal Pass the Rumanian Government took all state archives to Jassy, which became the temporary capital for Rumania. Upon the advice of the Allies and with their guarantee for safety the Rumanian Government transferred the National Treasury from Bucharest to Moscow in the fall of 1917. Aside from 900,000,000 francs (approximately $220,000,000) in gold and a large amount in notes, the National Treasury held stock certificates, bonds and other securities aggregating many million dollars, the private properties of Rumanian citizens who had deposited them with the Government.

The Russian revolution came so suddenly and unexpectedly that the Rumanian Government had no time to withdraw its treasury from Moscow. Major Irimescu explained that after the fall of Kerensky the Rumanian National Treasury was seized by Trotzky, who attempted to foment a Bolshevik revolution in Rumania but failed.

"In answer to the demand of the Rumanian Government for the return of the 900,000,000 francs in gold and millions in securities belonging to the Rumanian people," said Major Irimescu, "Trotzky replied that the Rumanian National Treasury and all that was in it belonged to the working people in Rumania and not to the present monarchial Government; that he (Trotzky) considered himself the trustee of the Rumanian working people and would hold the National Treasury until such time as the peasants of Rumania would overthrow the present Government and establish a Soviet Government.

"As the National Treasury was removed to Moscow upon the advice of the Allies and under their guarantee of safety, the Rumanian people are looking to the Allies for the return to Bucharest of their national funds and privately owned securities."

Major Irimescu said it was not known to what extent Trotzky might have drawn upon the Rumanian gold to finance Bolshevik revolution in Rumania and other countries. He declared that conditions in Rumania were serious, and that reconstruction was made particularly difficult by the theft of the national funds and of so many millions of stocks, bonds and other securities privately owned. He said that his own modest fortune was in the hands of Trotzky.

The Government has helped matters somewhat by paying dividends and interest on bonds and securities held by the Bolsheviki, much as the French Government has been paying to its people the interest on more than one billion dollars loaned to the old Czaristic Government of Russia and repudiated by the Bolsheviki.

Besides the claims for Bessarabia, Bukowina and Transylvania, the Rumanian demands at the Peace Conference, said Major Irimescu, will be the return of the Rumanian National Treasury.

Major Irimescu is an aviator, commanded several flying squadrons during the war, but more recently has been on the staff of Crown Prince Carol. Next to the French Minister, he said, Mr. Vopicka of Chicago the American Minister, is the most popular official in Bucharest.

"Upon the return of the Government from Jassy to Bucharest," said the Major, "Mr. Vopicka was given a tremendous popular ovation as an acknowledgment of his services to the Rumanian people."

Major Irimescu expects to buy an entire shipload of goods for Rumania, including printing presses.